Department of Environment and Conservation
Our environment, our future

RECOVERY TEAM ANNUAL REPORT

THREATENED SPECIES AND/OR COMMUNITIES RECOVERY TEAM

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Recovery Team	**Dibbler Recovery Team**
Reporting Period	**Calendar year 2011**

Current membership as at 31st December 2011

Please include email addresses as we would like updated contact details for recovery team members
Also please include vacant positions and regular guests

Member		Representing
1. Chair	**Dr Tony Friend**	Supervising Scientist, Dibbler project, DEC Science Division
2. Exec Officer	**Tim Button**	Dibbler Technical Officer, DEC Science Division
3.	**Dr Roberta Bencini**	Research student supervisor, University of WA
4	**Peter Collins**	South Coast Region, DEC
5.	**Benson Todd**	Midwest Region, DEC
6	**Geoff Burrow**	Malleefowl Preservation Group
7	**Dr Vic Smith**	South Coast community
8	**Jeremy Carter/ Rebecca Carter**	Jurien Bay community
9	**Dr Helen Robertson**	Director Animal Health and Research, Perth Zoo
10	**Peter Orell**	Species and Communities Branch, DEC
11	**Dr Tony Start**	Scientist with expertise in dibblers
12	**Dr Pat Woolley**	Scientist with expertise in dibblers (corresponding)
13	**Dr Chris Dickman**	Scientist with expertise in dibblers (corresponding)
14	**Dr Dorian Moro**	Scientist with expertise in dibblers (corresponding)
15	**Cathy Lambert**	Senior keeper, dibblers, Perth Zoo

Dates meetings were held	18th March 2011 and 15th September 2011

One to two paragraph summary of achievements suitable for *WATSNU*	Recovery actions for the Endangered dibbler have continued despite the lack of salary funding for field activity. Following the first good winter rains for some years, the reintroduced population at Peniup NR has rallied, to the point that a proposed top-up was cancelled and instead the translocation planned for next year into the Gilbert's potoroo enclosure was brought forward. Sixty-four dibblers from Perth Zoo were released into the enclosure on 3rd October 2011. Follow-up trapping has been promising, with the rate of survival of released animals in line with that seen at Peniup. Dibbler populations in the Fitzgerald River NP and the Jurien Bay islands are still at low levels but individuals are in good condition. Revised captive breeding strategies employed at Perth Zoo in 2011 have paid off, resulting in the highest number of young yet produced.

List of actions undertaken by Recovery Team members

Action 1 Monitoring

Fitzgerald River National Park (FRNP)

The Fitzgerald River NP is the stronghold of the dibbler. Its large geographical extent ensures a diversity of weather conditions and fire histories and consequently a number of areas experience favourable conditions for dibblers at any one time.

Currently a large part of the western FRNP is recovering from a wildfire that affected 15% of the entire national park in January 2008. Post-fire recovery of the vegetation has not reached the stage where conditions are suitable for dibblers.

Low rainfall, especially in the eastern FRNP, was apparently the cause for low numbers from 2008 to the end of 2011. This period of low numbers commenced in 2008 when very few young survived the dry winter. These results have been found at both long-term Western Shield monitoring sites (Twertup Creek and Moir Track transects.) as well as at the trapping grid near the intersection of Hamersley Drive and Moir Track, where the years 2009-2011 have shown the lowest numbers since the study commenced in May 2005. Individuals are I good condition. However, and population recovery is anticipated if good rains continue.

Jurien Bay Islands

The Boullanger Island population has showed a decline each year since 2005. Until 2011, the Whitlock Island population maintained steady numbers, but this changed this year, with a decline to low numbers on this island as well. This could be a response to low winter rainfall over the last 2-3 years.

The Escape Island population was not monitored in 2011 although an attempt to get to the island during the May monitoring trip was foiled by unsuitable sea conditions.

Action 2 Habitat Management

Fox control was carried out in all known mainland dibbler population sites by aerial and ground baiting four times a year under the Western Shield program. Supplementary monthly ground baiting is carried out at Peniup. The monthly baiting carried out around the Stirling Range NP translocation site ceased during 2011 following the decision of the Recovery Team to treat that translocation as a failure.

Action 3 Survey

No new surveys for dibblers were carried out during 2011 due to lack of funding.

Action 4 Captive breeding

In order to more reliably produce around 50 animals for each release, two extra pairs were retained for this breeding season, with the contingency that if more produced young than the Zoo had resources to hold, the excess could be released with their mothers as small pouch young. This contingency was needed this year, with the breeding season producing a total of 94 young from 12 females. Twenty-four of these were released with their mothers into the Waychinicup NP enclosure in June 2011 while still attached to the teats and 69 of the 70 remaining at the Zoo survived to weaning.

A further three females that had been replaced in the breeding group in December 2010 by wild-caught animals were permitted to mate prior to being released at Waychinicup in April 2011.

Sixty-two dibblers (40 males and 22 females) were provided for release into the Waychinicup enclosure on 3rd October 2011. This total included five wild-born animals brought in earlier from the Fitzgerald River NP to enhance the breeding colony.

Action 5 Translocation

At its meeting in September 2011, the recovery team decided that all of the dibblers available from the Zoo colony would be released at Peniup in a final attempt to get that population established. After the meeting and just before the scheduled release, Tim Button's monitoring trip to Peniup resulted in the capture of 27 dibblers. The Recovery Team was consulted and there was agreement not to go ahead with the release of more dibblers at Peniup, but to send all the release animals to the Gilbert's potoroo enclosure at Waychinicup NP, where a trial release in October 2010 had showed promise, with the establishment of a few animals. The release at Waychinicup went ahead on 3rd October 2011.

Trapping in the enclosure in December 2011 resulted in the capture of four of the released animals, indicating that the habitat may be able to support a dibbler population.

Action 6 Genetics

DNA samples are collected from each dibbler handled but no analysis has been carried out since 2001.

Action 7 Community involvement

Community involvement in the dibbler recovery program continued in 2011. Three community members are members of the recovery team. Local community members often work as volunteers to help with fieldwork and their assistance is vital to the success of the work. In 2011, 5 people accompanied dibbler project staff on field trips to Jurien Bay, Peniup and FRNP, carrying out a total of 21 person-days providing vital assistance in the field.

Action 8 Research

A seven-year population study has continued at a dibbler site in the eastern FRNP with all-weather access. This site provides comparative data against which population parameters in reintroduced populations may be assessed.